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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ATHENS 001652

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OREP](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [GR](#)
SUBJECT: EMBASSY ATHENS WELCOMES CODEL POE

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

1. (SBU) Embassy Athens warmly welcomes the December 15-16 visit of CODEL Poe to Athens. Control Officer for the visit to Athens will be Political Officer Elaine Paplos, 30-210-720-2756 (Office), 30-694-439-0185 (cell), 30-210-729-5313. The Control Officer will meet you at the Athens Airport accompany you throughout your stay in Athens.

2. (SBU) On December 8, 2008 the United States Embassy alerted U.S. citizens to the continuing possibility of civil disturbances and demonstrations throughout Greece in the wake of the violent demonstrations that occurred on the weekend of December 6th and 7th. A national day of mourning is planned for Tuesday December 9th. A general strike, to include the transportation sector, is planned for Wednesday December 10th.

Demonstrations intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational and possibly escalate into violence. American citizens are therefore urged to avoid the areas of demonstrations, and to exercise caution if within the vicinity of any demonstration. American citizens should stay current with media coverage of local events and be aware of their surroundings at all times.

3. (SBU) Over the past year, the U.S. Embassy has experienced bomb threats, protest marches, and anti-U.S. demonstrations. These protests are generally peaceful though a few provoked random acts of violence. Travelers to Greece are advised that protests or demonstrations could occur at any time; unwitting observers or bystanders might be identified, to their disadvantage, as Americans.

RSO recommends that official U.S. travelers in Greece remain alert when moving about in public places and avoid certain places where demonstrators frequently congregate. These places include the Polytechnical University area, located on 28 October (Patisision) Street between the National Archeological Museum and Omonia Square; Exarchion Square, located near Kolonaki; Omonia and Syntagma Squares, which are often used as launch sites for large demonstrations; and Mavili Square, located near the U.S. Embassy. Visitors should keep abreast of news about large demonstrations and avoid these areas and metro stops

4. (SBU) Embassy Athens has a "high" designation for indigenous terrorism. In the past, local Greek terrorist groups have targeted prominent Greeks as well as certain non-Greek Officials, including Americans. We believe that the threat to official US Government personnel on short-term assignments to Greece or visiting for tourism is relatively low. The indigenous groups historically have engaged in extensive operational surveillance over long periods of time. In 2003 and again in 2004, the Greek Government made significant progress to combat domestic terrorism by successfully convicting the leader and key hit men of the November 17 terrorist organization and of the ELA. 17N was responsible for assassinating prominent Greeks and five members of the US Mission over the course of its 30-year history. Convicted ELA members were responsible for

several bombings, attempted murders and were involved in at least one assassination. While these convictions likely impacted on the operational capabilities of 17N and ELA, it is too soon to assess whether the threat from 17N and ELA was completely eliminated. New domestic terror groups with similar ideologies to 17N have launched attacks against both local government agencies including police stations and businesses. The domestic terrorist group Revolutionary Struggle (RS) launched a Rocket Propelled Grenade at the US Embassy on January 7, 2007. Greek Police have not made any arrests. We urge vigilance and caution, as the worldwide threat from other terrorist groups against Americans in general remains high.

15. (SBU) Crime is rated "medium" in Greece. For TDY visitors, pick pocketing and purse snatching are the most common crimes. Taxis are generally safe though metered cabs are recommended. Taxis too will often pick up more than one passenger unless prior arrangements are made. Crimes of opportunity - thefts, break-ins, and occasional scams - are on the rise. Travelers should be especially cautious with wallets, purses, and parcels when traveling on crowded streets, public buses, trolleys, and/or subways. There have been several instances of motorcyclists approaching cars stuck in traffic, reaching through open windows or smashing closed ones, and stealing whatever is within reach. We have also recently learned of a new method in which motorcyclists open the trunk of a vehicle and remove the contents. Security recommends keeping purses, parcels, handbags, etc. out of sight under the seat or on the floor of the car. Windows should be kept closed and doors locked. Pedestrians may also be confronted by beggars and other street people who may attempt to divert attention, then steal unprotected valuables - either by pick pocketing or snatch-and-grab techniques. Women are generally safe from violent crime in Greece. Men are aggressive by American standards however when pursuing women.

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16. (SBU) Traffic in Greek urban areas, especially Athens and Thessaloniki, is undisciplined. Greece has a poor record within the European Union for traffic fatalities.

SPECKHARD